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ACTION SS 30

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FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1662
INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Joan Izarbeg DATE 1/26/82
PORTIONS DENIED AS INDICATED

S E C R J DSAIGON 19955

EXDIS

PARIS FOR VN MISSION

SUBJ: REPORTS ABOUT POSSIBLE POSTPONEMENT OF SENATE ELECTIONS

REF: STATE 166388

1. WE HAD NOTED THESE REPORTS WITH CONSIDERABLE INTEREST AND SOME CONCERN, PARTICULARLY SINCE ONE OF THEM ORIGINATED WITH SENATOR [redacted]

2. IN THE MEANTIME WE HAD ALSO HEARD DIRECTLY FROM SEVERAL SENATORS THAT THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE THE ELECTIONS POSTPONED, BUT THESE VIEWS INCLUDED NO INDICATION THAT THEY EXPECTED THE EXECUTIVE TO SUPPORT, LET ALONE INITIATE A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE (AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW THE SENATE COULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE ITSELF.) THE ARGUMENTS ADDUCED IN FAVOR POSTPONEMENT (SECURITY SITUATION, EXPENSE, ADMINISTRATIVE DIFFICULTIES, DANGER OF UNDESIRABLE PEOPLE GETTING IN) SEEM SPECIOUS AND SELF-SERVING.

3. YESTERDAY OCT 2 POLITICAL COUNSELOR AT MY INSTRUCTION RAISED THIS MATTER PRIVATELY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER LAM WHO SEES THIEU FREQUENTLY AND AS FORMER SENATOR IS IN TOUCH ALSO WITH SUNG AND OTHER SENATORS. LAM SIAD IT IS OUT OF QUESTION THAT THIEU WOULD CONSIDER SUCH A MOVE. BUT IF HE HEARD OF ANYTHING LIKE IT HE WOULD OPPOSE IT BOTH AS FOREIGN MINISTER

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AND AS SENATOR (ON LEAVE) WHOSE LAST POST HAD BEEN CHAIRMAN OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE.

4. LAM ADDED THAT ANY MOVE TO POSTPONE THE SENATE ELECTIONS WOULD MAKE NO SENSE IN VIEW OF FACT THAT THE LOWER HOUSE HAS ALREADY PASSED LEGISLATION FOR PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND THE SENATE IS ABOUT TO APPROVE THEM FOR THE COMING SPRING. IF PROVINCIAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS CAN BE HELD IN THE SPRING. THER IS NO REASON WHY SENATORIAL ELECTIONS CANNOT BE HELD IN LATE SUMMER.

5. WE ALSO RAISED THIS MATTER CASUALLY WITH MINISTER OF STATE DAN. HIS REACTION WAS INSTANTANEOUS: TO POSTPONE THE SENATE ELECTIONS WOULD BE A GRAVE POLITICAL ERROR. HE HAD HEARD NOTHING ABOUT SUCH A PLAN AND HE, TOO, SAID HE WAS DOUBTFUL THAT THIEU HAD EVER SERIOUSLY ENTERTAINED IT.

6. GIVEN THE DIVERGENCE OF INFORMATION ON THIS MATTER, IT MAY WELL BE THAT PRESIDENT THEIU BRIEFLY TOYED WITH THE IDEA, BUT HAS NOW BACKED AWAY FROM IT, REALIZING THAT IT WOULD PROVOKE HOSTILITY AND CRITICISM AS WELL AS REAISING DIFFICULT AND CONTROVERSIAL CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION.

7. STILL, SINCE THERE CONTINUES TO BE SOME SMOKE, WE WILL CONTINUE TO LOOK QUIETLY IF THERE IS ANY FIRE, AND TO POUR WATER WHEREVER NECESSARY.
BERGER
BT

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